



Wellesley Historical Commission

Town Hall • 525 Washington Street • Wellesley, MA 02482-5992

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August 21, 2015

VIA EMAIL – EHunter@MBTA.com

Edmond Hunter, Assistant General Manager for Design and Construction
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority
10 Park Plaza
Boston, Mass. 02116

Re: Bacon Street Railroad Bridge, Wellesley, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Hunter:

I write on behalf of the Wellesley Historical Commission (“WHC”), which recently became aware that the MBTA is in the early planning stages for the repair or replacement of the Bacon Street Railroad Bridge, known historically as Bridge No. 34A (the “Bridge”). Pursuant to G.L. c. 40, § 8D and Article 17 of the Bylaws of the Town of Wellesley, the WHC is the town body charged with the preservation and protection of the tangible evidence of the architectural, aesthetic, cultural, economic, political and social history of the Town.

Given the historical aspects of the Bridge, the WHC is writing for the following three reasons: (1) to advise the MBTA of the WHC’s interest in this historic Bridge, (2) to obtain a preliminary understanding as to the extent of the Bridge’s repair or replacement, particularly with regard to the configuration of the Bacon Street underpass, and (3) to offer our assistance in this process with respect to the re-use of (or replication of) existing historic design elements from the Bridge.

I. The Historic Nature of the Bacon Street Bridge.

As you are aware, the Bridge was originally constructed in 1893 (and reconstructed in 1911) as part of the Boston & Albany Railroad’s (the “B&A”) grade separation effort along its Boston mainline. The Bridge is of the then-common plate girder style of construction, having been fabricated by the Fort Pitt Bridge Works in Canonsburg, Pennsylvania (known for many of the river crossing bridges in Pittsburgh). The Bridge is a single span that allows for the passage of four tracks above Bacon Street. The stone bridge abutments are made of original Quincy granite, and are constructed in the hallmark style of the B&A, examples of which can be seen on numerous bridges crossing the B&A’s Boston mainline today (e.g., along the northern side of the

Massachusetts Turnpike in Newton). Their continued use today over 122 years since they were laid speaks volumes to their strength, practicality, and simple elegance.

Although common at the time (there were six original B&A bridges in the Town alone, and 19 overall constructed in 1911 by the B&A) — and even common as recently as the late 1980s — this type of turn-of-the-century plate girder bridge is the last remaining such bridge in the Town of Wellesley. Indeed, as they have fallen into disrepair, this style of historic bridge construction is fast disappearing across the Commonwealth.

II. Request for Preliminary Understanding of Scope of Work.

In light of the above, the WHC requests a preliminary, high-level understanding from the MBTA as to the MBTA's plans with respect to the Bridge. Recognizing fully that the MBTA is still in the early stages of this process, the WHC would like to gauge whether the MBTA is looking to rehabilitate, repair, or replace the Bridge entirely, and whether the MBTA has any potential design ideas in mind.

Additionally, as residents of — and drivers in — Wellesley, we are keenly aware of the sharp 90-degree turn required at both approaches to the Bridge underpass, and realize that a more gradual approach may be under consideration. To the extent reconfiguration alternatives are being considered that would adversely impact the existing historic granite abutments, the WHC would be interested in understanding the implications of those proposals for the historic fabric of the Bridge. We would request that the MBTA give serious consideration to the re-use of those granite abutments, as such original abutments have been frequently re-used with new bridge decks across the Commonwealth.

III. Request for Consultation During Design.

Finally, due to the historic nature of the Bridge and per the WHC's obligations under both the General Laws and Town Bylaws, the WHC respectfully requests that the MBTA include the WHC as a formal consulting party where appropriate, and keep the WHC informed throughout the planning and design process of the Bridge.

The WHC is also pleased to make itself available to advise the MBTA and/or your engineers on incorporating either the actual original components of the Bridge or historically-influenced design elements, particularly in terms of the plate girder-style bridge deck and the granite abutments. Indeed, the WHC frequently advises both private developers and Town departments on the re-use of historically-significant design features in both rehabilitated structures and new construction, and would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with the MBTA in this regard.

The WHC would also be pleased to arrange a site visit with the MBTA and its engineering contractors, to view the existing Bridge and discuss the potential repair and replacement options in light of the historic value of the structure.

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Thank you for your time and attention to our interest in the Bacon Street Bridge. The WHC looks forward to working closely with the MBTA from the earliest stages of this process through to its completion, as our experience has been that such early collaboration often results in the best outcomes for all interested entities. The WHC looks forward to hearing from you regarding any preliminary decisions as to the Bridge design that have been made to this point. Should you have any questions at all, please feel free to contact me at tad@wellesleyhistoricalcommission.org.

Sincerely,

Tad Heuer
Chairman

cc: David L. Murphy, Chairman, Town of Wellesley Board of Selectmen
Hans Larsen, Executive Director of General Government Services, Town of Wellesley
David J. Hickey, Jr., Town Engineer, Town of Wellesley Engineering Division
Michael Zehner, Planning Director, Town of Wellesley
Christopher Skelly, Massachusetts Historical Commission